

The members of Vermont's Congressional Delegation – U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D), U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I), and U.S. Rep. Peter Welch (D) – Saturday said the approval of a \$10 million federal loan -- \$9 million of it guaranteed by USDA – for a significant new biomass production facility in Island Pond, Vt., is on target to create new jobs in a strategic emerging sector of Vermont's economy.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, during a town meeting on Vermont agriculture Saturday morning in Burlington, said the loan comes from funds appropriated by Congress in last year's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which included additional resources for USDA Rural Development's Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program. Island Pond-based Vermont Renewable Energy Company has been selected to receive the \$10 million loan, \$9 million of which has been guaranteed by USDA, to establish a pellet processing plant. The company plans to use the vacant Ethan Allen plant in Island Pond in processing local hardwood lumber into chips and, eventually, into pellets, for use in renewable energy production and other purposes. USDA says the funding will result in creation of 34 high-quality-wage jobs in Essex County.

The three members of the Vermont Delegation have championed biomass conversion efforts in Vermont and in Congress.

Leahy, the most senior member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, which has jurisdiction over USDA, said, "The Northeast Kingdom has been hit hard in the recession. These funds give Island Pond and the entire Northeast Kingdom a head start in growing new jobs in the forest products sector – one of Vermont's most promising and underutilized industries. This is a clear win for Vermont's economy, creating jobs we need today and laying more of the groundwork for the Vermont economy we are building for tomorrow." Leahy, also a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, by now has secured \$5.6 million for the Vermont Biomass Energy Resource Center (BERC) in Montpelier, which is a national leader in developing sustainable biomass energy systems at the community scale. The systems supported by BERC will be some of the primary customers for the new biomass produced in Island Pond.

Sanders, chairman of the Senate's green jobs subcommittee, said, "This is a win-win for Vermont. It will help our economy and our environment. Vermont schools and universities and homes and businesses already are increasingly using efficient biomass heating to reduce energy bills and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. It makes sense that companies looking to produce wood pellets would want to locate in Vermont and create new production facilities and new jobs here."

Welch, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said, "This is great news for Island Pond and the entire Northeast Kingdom. Vermont's growing wood biomass industry has enormous potential to create jobs in communities that need them the most. I appreciate Secretary Vilsack's support for our state's agricultural and forestry economies."